

"Raw, unapologetic, and relatable." — Kathryn Caldwell, PhD

NAKED

- My Body's Story -

MARCY S. LITTLE

Special Praise for *Naked*

“Memoirist Marcy Little’s Naked: My Body’s Story delivers the pleasures of the popular woman’s self-help memoir genre while distinguishing itself in several meaningful ways. It tells the story of a woman’s journey toward deeper self-awareness by using well-crafted storytelling to offer sustained, insightful reflection that extends beyond the narrative.

Little is immediately identifiably relatable. She is divorced. She fights with her mother at family gatherings. She has awkward run-ins with her ex-therapist. She likes it when her husband notices her body. Imagine your coolest, funniest, most-centered friend opening her heart to you over a luxurious, healthy meal, telling you stories that speak directly to your experiences of having a body that grows and breaks. That’s Naked: My Body’s Story!”

—Leah Shafer, PhD, Associate Professor of Media and Culture Studies

“In Naked: My Body’s Story, Marcy gives us a powerful roadmap to the healing that is possible when we as women own and share our stories, break free from the shame that keeps us stuck and feeling alone, and learn to fully embrace ourselves and our amazing bodies exactly as they are.”

—Lorraine Faehndrich, Women’s Pelvic Health and Pain Relief Coach

“Marcy Little weaves a captivating story of love, redemption, longing, and forgiveness in the wake of intergenerational trauma.”

—Melissa Tuckey, Author of *Tenuous Chapel* and Editor of *Ghost Fishing: An Eco-Justice Poetry Anthology*

“An honest journey into the heart of healing. As a reader, you will vicariously walk this path toward wholeness with Marcy as your compassionate and loving guide.”

—Rachel Bush, Licensed Ayurveda Practitioner and Certified Anusara Yoga Instructor

*“I recently had the honor of reading the compelling *Naked: My Body’s Story* by Marcy Little. As a psychiatrist who has worked in the fields of trauma and recovery from abuse for over twenty-five years, I found Marcy’s story skillfully conveyed, moving, and filled with hope and humanity. Marcy brings a courageous willingness to look deeply at the impact of her childhood and adolescent traumatic experiences on her adult journey to find her own true freedom. Her memoir combines this deep honesty and vulnerability with an engaging writing style that allows the reader to really come to know her and her journey. This book was hard to put down! I feel enriched, both as a professional and as a woman in our objectifying culture, for having read her inspiring story.”*

—Kristen Nygren, MD

“Naked is raw, unapologetic, and relatable. Marcy’s personal story does a service to other women who have survived trauma. Even with my background in psychology and human development, her account was a revelation. This honest and true chronicle of healing sexual abuse pushed me to my own edges, made me reflect on past traumas I thought I had resolved, and question their lasting impact on my body and in my relationships. Marcy’s journey is in the living, and living can be messy. She doesn’t pretend to have all the answers. Instead, with tremendous courage and vulnerability, she tells her story in a way we can all relate to, as fellow

humans on the path to wholeness and integration. As we heal ourselves, so too do we heal this mixed-up world.”

—Kathryn Caldwell, PhD

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My Body's Story

Marcy S. Little

My Body Press

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Publisher's Note

This book contains general information about recovery and healing from sexual abuse/trauma. It examines the impact of such abuse/trauma on the body, ways to address it, and the healing journey of the author. The information contained herein is not medical advice. This book is not an alternative to medical advice from your doctor or other professional healthcare provider.

Every effort has been made to ensure that events, institutions, and statistics presented in this book as facts are accurate and up-to-date. To protect their privacy, the names of some of the people, places, and institutions in this book may have been changed.

Cover design and interior by Megan Pugh.

To my mother, my biggest hero.

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Prologue

Can a fifteen-year-old virgin puking in the toilet because she's drunk give consent to a twenty-two-year-old man?

No.

No woman vomiting from intoxication can give consent. To this, add my premenstrual stage of development. I was a child on the cusp of blossoming into a young woman.

After I was raped, I became sexually promiscuous. It's in all the textbooks. Common behavior. But I wasn't reading any of these textbooks. I was just acting out my shame.

The die is cast. My body has been defiled. Any notion of innate worthiness, however small, I might have garnered in my childhood innocence has been stolen—cast aside permanently. Dirty laundry that's hopelessly stained.

I go with this new flow, engage in intercourse with teenage boys as clueless as I am. Moving through an unconscious cloud, I find myself secretly having sex with one of my sister's girlfriend's boyfriends. We break into my stepfather's small apartment during the day while he is at work, make toast and slice butter off the top of the stick instead of the front (a dead giveaway I have been there).

"Marcy, were you at my place yesterday?"

"Yeah. I just stopped in for a snack on my way into Binghamton," I lie.

While at my stepfather's place, my secret sex partner and I end up in the tub, naked, trying out things we heard about or saw in movies. Things that are supposed to be sexy.

I feel nothing. Nothing in my body. Nothing in my mind. Nothing in my heart. I am absent from the scene. Some other person has taken over my body and is going through the

motions. Performing. Trying hard to be pleasing. Trying hard to be loved and accepted. Isn't this the way?



It takes me thirty years to understand what happened to me. Thirty years to confront the pain encased in my cells. Thirty years to find my voice.

Like so many women, I am a survivor of sexual trauma and abuse. Like so many women, this early trauma still has a grasp on many aspects of my life, on many aspects of myself. Like so many women, I still struggle with intimacy and boundaries. Like so many women, things can still get really confusing in my body and my mind.

For a year, I studied myself, stayed with questions, listened deeply, and wrote it all down. An attempt to capture cellular level healing through a deep exploration of the contours of my own perplexing sexuality as a survivor of sexual trauma and abuse.

This is my journey.

Chapter One

And So It Begins . . .

“Do you remember how that babysitter touched us?” my sister casually asked.

We are sitting outside on my mother’s front porch one halcyon day in early fall of 2016. On the hill across the river valley, leaves dress the trees with a mottled mix of rust and yellow and scarlet.

She takes a long drag off her Allegany Reservation cigarette.

“No. I don’t,” I say as my head, now searching for that lost memory, surveys the scene.

“I guess you wouldn’t. I was only three,” she replies and takes another long slow drag of her cigarette.

I choke on my spit.

For as long as I can remember, I have been aware of the sexual part of my human nature. It seems like that awareness was present from an early age, though I couldn’t say exactly when. I just *knew* it was there. It was a part of me.

My sister is two years older than me. If she was three, then I was one. Of course, I have no conscious memory of it—but my body does.

Denny continues to smoke in the slow lazy way she has, while my diaphragm spasms in a struggle to remove the offending spit from my lungs. My mind is cataloging every time my body has recoiled in fear when my partner touches me with desire.

Bessel Van der Kolk in his seminal book, *The Body Keeps the Score*, cautions that “Long after a traumatic experience is over, it may be reactivated at the slightest hint of danger.”

The earth opens beneath me. I fall in.

The rest of the day is a blur of overcooked hamburgers and family bickering. I sneak sideways glances at my mother wondering, *How could you let this happen to us?*



The following Saturday, I am sitting with some of my African dance friends. We have come together to have a girls' night and make body butter. I've brought enough beeswax for three gallons of lotion. We sit on the carpeted floor of the small apartment sharing a joint while a woman I've met for the first time works away in the kitchen. The wooden spoon swipes against the side of the melting pot.

I share the story my sister told me. I feel nothing as I talk.

"It confirms something for me," I say. "Something I've always known but could never put into words. It explains so much."

According to Van der Kolk, trauma, by nature, shuts down the limbic and neocortical parts of the brain that allow us to give words to our experience. Instead, the brain stem, the part that induces us to fight, run, or freeze when our lives are in danger, is activated. Even if my initial trauma had been at a later age, I might not have been able to put it into words.

My friends look at me with compassion. Soon, they are hugging me, patting me on the back. No tears come.

Another woman speaks up.

"I was sexually abused by my stepfather."

This fellow African dancer's lack of boundaries has grated against my psyche since we first met. When Marisa hugs, she gives what I call a "vagina hug," pressing her whole body into mine, her crotch onto my leg. I try to relax when she does this. *Be cool. Go with the flow.* But I hate it. When she dances behind me in class, she doesn't keep space between our bodies. By the time I have reached the end of the floor, ready to make my exit dance move to the drummers, I

can feel her breath on my back. I turn around, motion for her to back up, but within minutes, she's right behind me coming down the floor again. *Does she even see my body in front of her?*

Marisa recounts the years of violation she endured at the hands of a father figure.

"I'm okay with it," she says, "I think it's just a part of me now. My sexuality is alive in everything I do." She blinks twice to convince herself that what she has just said is as normal as making body salve with the girls.

A softness rises up in my chest toward this woman, who, like me, is doing the very best she can.



My first orgasm surprised me during a daily afternoon nap when I was three. I had the habit of pulling the covers together and putting them between my legs where I would rub against them. It soothed me and helped me fall asleep. One day this nap-time ritual caused an overwhelmingly pleasurable sensation.

What was that? I wondered as I went about trying to make it happen again. And again. And again. Sometimes I succeeded, many times I did not. There was some mystery in it I couldn't fully understand.

Somehow I knew that what was happening was private; that it was just for me. I began to look forward to these special times with myself during the day or at night.

At age four, I had my first sleep over at my friend Laura's house. I loved Laura. I especially loved that she lived within walking distance of my house.

I was startled when her mother said we'd be sleeping in the same bed.

In the same bed? I thought.

But our bodies will be so close.

I didn't sleep a wink that night, aware all night long of Laura's skin so near to my own. Would we touch each other? Would someone know? My cheeks glowed in the dark with shame and excitement. I had no idea where this shame or desire came from at that time. Now, as I look back, I can see how much of my future sexual terrain had already been set. Was it the improper and unwanted touch of the male babysitter when I was a baby or was there something more? How much of the hurt in my mother's sexually abused body was living actively in my own, causing feelings to arise that I had no conscious context to understand?

My mother once allowed a neighbor's child to babysit for me when I was just a baby. She came home to find me covered in bruises. Unable to protect us as she had been unable to protect herself growing up, she allowed that child to babysit for me again.

Later, she called me an "independent" child.

"When you were tired, you would just go fall asleep under the picnic table. We would find you there after all the guests had gone home."

I learned to crawl to safety and stay out of sight even before I learned to walk.



We moved from our sheltered neighborhood in Rockville, MD, into our new suburban home in Pittsford, NY, when I was five. Our dog, Muffit, was a small, scrappy Tibetan-terrier with scruffy white fur that got dirty easily.

There were lots of young children to play with in our new white upper-middle-class neighborhood. Kids on bikes at all hours of the day. I had made some friends who would come over periodically for snacks and to share my Barbies.

In the process of moving in, a rolled-up carpet was left leaning at an angle against the wall of our living room. Muffit made it her lover. She would hump the hell out of that carpet roll while Denny and I watched television.

At first, we pretended it wasn't happening. It seemed so private. My mother would shoo her away. "Muffit. Stop that."

Muffit would slink dejectedly into the kitchen, but it wasn't long before she was back at the carpet roll.

I was mesmerized. As Muffit humped away, my cheeks reddened. Isn't this what I did alone at night with my sheets and pillows? Everyone who saw Muffit found it shameful. Did this make my relationship with the bunched sheets equally shameful?

My sister and I giggled when Muffit started. When our friends came over, we showed off Muffit like a circus act. We all stood watching as her little bottom moved up and down, up and down. We looked at each other wondering how this could be happening. It was exhilarating and embarrassing.

Muffit became more and more emphatic in her lovemaking to the carpet roll. She started to growl at us if we stepped too near, making the boundaries of her pleasure clear. One day, she bit one of my friends. Broke the skin. That was the end. My mother gave Muffit away to a family in the country where she would be more happy and less dangerous to the neighborhood children. The carpet went, too. I don't remember where, but it disappeared along with the dog.



My sister had also discovered the secret pleasures housed between her legs. I would often end up in her room at some point in the night when we were young. In matching twin beds, we played the game "What's Up?" where we each took turns hiding under the covers and sticking some part of our body up into the sheet. It was the other's job to identify and name which body part was at play. We could play this game for hours, never tiring of it.

One night, two years after my secret discovery, she let me in on her own.

"Do you touch yourself *there*?" she asked.

I knew what she meant, but played as if I didn't.

"Where?"

"You know. There," and she pointed to the space between her seven-year-old thighs.

I desperately wanted to tell my sister what I had discovered. To add to my already increasing shame, I think my mom was onto me because my crotch was rubbed raw. She would put Vaseline on it at night before I went to bed. I couldn't bring myself to divulge my secret—to my sister and, especially, to my mom. I didn't dare. Something held me back. If I told my sister what I did, would she make fun of me? If I told my mom, would she think I was a freak or think I was being nasty? Would she tell me, "Marcy, stop that!" like she did with Muffit. Would she send me away, too?

Girls were supposed to *touch* themselves to find pleasure, not rub on a sheet.

Why did I even know this at the age of five?

"No," I said to my sister, "I don't."

Our nighttime game of "What's Up," never felt the same again. We were different. My sister's sexuality was normal. Mine was not.

Around this same time, we had a twelve-year-old female babysitter. She came around during the daytime, probably so that my mother could do the grocery shopping in peace. In the living room, still charged with poor Muffit's sexual energy, was a feather duster. The babysitter, my sister, and I would make up imaginative play with this yellow-tipped feather duster. I have no idea who thought up the game, but before long we were taking off our clothes while we tickled each other's private parts with it.

It was titillating. It was wrong. We knew we would be in trouble if we got caught. We did it anyway. The risk only enhanced the thrill of it all. Somewhere in the back of my mind I wondered, *Is this okay?*

I enjoyed it even while it didn't feel quite right.

We were children. I wanted to play the game, which is why it never occurred to me until much, much later in my life, that what went down in that living room on sunny afternoons with the babysitter was a violation. There was no one there to set the boundaries. To keep us safe. To protect our innocence.

Our twelve-year-old feather duster lover wasn't our only babysitter. My mother also paid a male teenager to take care of us whenever she and my dad went out. One day, I spied Denny in her bedroom with him. He was reading her a book. Her legs were wide-open exposing her underwear.

Close your legs! my mind screamed. I saw my seven-year-old sister's open legs as an invitation and no one for miles to protect her.



I was a child who loved to play with my Barbies, ride my bike whenever I could, play make-believe games with my sister and the other neighborhood kids, and tried to keep thoughts of my sexual awakening to when I was alone in my bed at night. I didn't know my parents' marriage was unraveling. I didn't know my mother was in therapy or that she had begun to scratch the surface of her own painful story of sexual abuse at the hands of her father—an alcoholic and extremely traumatized WWII vet. I didn't know that the Gung Fu lessons she was taking three times a week were giving her the power to leave an unhappy, oppressive marriage. I didn't know until later that my father had also raped my mother when she refused him one night in bed.

Our house was infused with Marine Corps strictness. My father, also an extremely traumatized vet (Vietnam), was shot through the head three months into his deployment and miraculously survived. Proud to have served his country, he bore the deafness in his right ear like a badge of honor. The nightmares and post-traumatic stress were kept very secret.

His father, District Attorney and later, ruthless judge of a large city in upstate NY, had no patience for my father's artistic, sensitive side. He taught him to pull himself up by the bootstraps by sadistically making him dig and refill holes all day in the lawn on his only day off. Any lingering signs of weakness were beaten out of him at the dinner table each night with the belt from my grandfather's waist while his older brother, younger sister, and mother watched, pretending not to be horrified.

I believe my mother was every bit as scared of my father as we were. He carried the law and his word was gospel. Any divergence from the house rules would find us bending over, grabbing our ankles while he stood behind us as we waited for his heavy hand. When the slap came, I would wet my pants, do a forward roll and cry, humiliated to the core. My sister, older and closer to my father, weathered it better. Before long, my sister and I became allies against his rageful discipline. One day, when our father took his military stance as he prepared to hit us, we grabbed our ankles, looked at each other, and giggled. He never hit us again.



What I did not yet have the capacity to understand or put into words began to show up as nightmares while I was still awake. My bedroom, at the back side of the upstairs of the new house, looked out onto a hill where new construction was taking place. Pine trees stood at the edge of where the earth had been churned up. Its loamy smell penetrated my room. In the darkness of the night, I watched the silhouette of the trees. One night, they began to move. They walked toward our house, moving ominously toward my bedroom.

Most children, when scared at night, run for the comfort of their mother. I did not. I was terrified of my parents' bedroom, scared I would anger my father. I laid there, frozen, petrified, shaking, willing the trees to stop, but they just kept coming. I knew I would be consumed. I closed my eyes and trembled until I finally fell asleep.

I began staring at the ceiling before turning out the lights, focusing my mind on one spot to make it open up. *Was I trying to create a safe space to escape into?* I believed that if I concentrated hard enough, I could make objects move at my will or even disappear. How else could I stop those trees from coming to get me? At some point, the fear of being devoured by the trees must have been stronger than the fear of disturbing my father at night. I must have told them about the trees because my parents changed my room. My new room was much smaller at the front of the house facing the street. A street lamp kept it partially lit throughout the night, and the trees, now out of sight, disappeared from my consciousness.



It is April 2017, and I am on my way back from a journey to Mexico. Pulled out of work by my doctor for a severe reaction to mold in the classroom at the school where I teach, I headed to one of my favorite healing spots on the planet—Maya Tulum on the Yucatan Peninsula. After a week of relaxation on the white sands of the Riviera Maya, Mayan shamanic healing sessions, and midnight margaritas with new friends, I am headed home with an immune system reboot.

I have made my way to the gate of my connecting flight in Philly. I don't know why I am feeling so tired. I have just had the time of my life in Tulum. I am fully rested. Tan. Radiant. Renewed.

I am walking the long walk to Terminal F where I will catch my puddle jumper home to Ithaca. All along the way there are signs for ground transport. I stoically ignore them all.

I will walk, I confirm to myself. The exercise will do me good.

As I approach Terminal F, I marvel at the weariness in my legs. Why am I so exhausted? By the time I arrive at my gate, I can't wait to sit down. My backpack, I realize, is loaded with everything that would no longer fit in my carry-on, which is now crammed with Talavera style hand-painted Mexican pottery. It slowly dawns on me that I've been carrying fifty-two pounds of ceramics on my back and pushing everything I brought to Mexico for more than a mile.

No wonder I am tired. I think to myself. This old pattern of determination and self-discipline handed down the ranks perhaps from even further back than my father's father, a long outdated family trait, kicks me to the curb sometimes. *We do it to ourselves*, I think. *Aren't we our own worst enemies?*

I see this resistant, outmoded pattern loud and clear, and smile knowingly at myself. Yet, there is something I don't see. Is it just the Talavera in my bag that is weighing me down?



My husband, Chris, shifts back and forth, moving in and out of my sight. I see him as I roll my carry-on down the ramp of our small Ithaca airport.

He is wearing the rust-colored jeans I bought him at the Monoprix on the Champs-Élysée in Paris so many years back.

Damn you look good, I think as I move through the swinging gate into the center of the tiny Ithaca airport. I recall our first months, years together, when just the sight of him would bring a rush of excitement to my loins. The skin of his face and neck is a shade pinker than his pants, despite the frequent applications of the SPF 50 sunscreen he uses dutifully.

Full body hug. Soft. Familiar. Delicious.

My hand on his hip, then butt cheek in the middle of the mostly deserted airport. It is 10:34 p.m. I can feel the steely gaze of the woman seated to our right. I don't care. His hug feels like home and I sink right into it.

“You look good,” I say as I size him up. “I like your pants.”

We are both beaming.

“You too,” he says, words stick in his mouth with unrehearsed emotion.

He puts on the heavy backpack I’ve been wearing most of the day on my trek back.

“What have you got in here? A dead body?”

I just smile as he pushes my carry-on in front of us. We walk out of the airport hand in hand greedily stealing mutual glances.

And then it happens.

He places his hand on my back as we are crossing the road to the parking lot and my body doesn’t want it there.

In the car, he places his hand on my knee and my body doesn’t want it there.

Shit, I think. Here we go again. Did it have to happen so soon?

I gently move my knee away to free it once again. To free myself once again.

The easy openness I felt upon first seeing Chris has been swallowed whole, disappeared into a dark and mysterious vortex of history. I long for its return. I long for my own receptivity to his touch, but it is nowhere to be found.

“It will take some time for me to get back,” I say into the dark hum of the night.

“I know,” he says.

If you enjoyed reading chapter 1 of *Naked: My Body's Story* and want more, purchase *Naked* on [Kindle](#) or in [paperback](#) on Amazon.com.

With love always,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Little', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marcy Little
Author of *Naked: My Body's Story*
Marcylittle.com

